

# WHY WE WON THE AMERICA'S CUP

By Colin E. Ratsey

*Author Colin E. Ratsey, City Island sailmaker, is owner and skipper of the ocean-racing 40-foot yawl Golliwogg, and was a leading member of Columbia's afterguard.*

To be asked to write on "Why we won the America's Cup" is a tall order. I think it can best be summed up in one word: preparation.

This preparation started with Vim, a tried and true 12-meter.

When the challenge for the America's Cup was received, what more natural thing for Olin Stephens to do but to study the lines and tank test results of this boat made nearly a score of years ago, and compare them with information gathered in tank testing hundreds of models since Vim was built in 1939? The next step was to design several Twelves incorporating different ideas which might improve on Vim's speed, tank test these models and compare them with Vim.

I think perhaps one of the reasons we won the America's Cup was the fact that Stephens took weeks to correlate the information developed from these tests, and did not decide on the ultimate hull in a hurry.

In Columbia's construction everything which could be made light above the water line was considered. The bulkheads and floors were made in a honey-combed aluminum used in aircraft. Deck layout was gone over in the greatest detail: the leads of all sheets and runners; where every line would go on each point of sailing; nothing

was overlooked.

When it came to sails, the engine, so to speak, of the boat, perfection was the only thing anyone would settle for. Sails came back into the lofts time and again to get even the smallest wrinkle out, every leach tabling just right. Before the Cup series started some of the sails looked like perforated postage stamps from all the stitch holes where adjustments had been made. Nothing would just do—it had to be right.

Then came the endless training of the crew. There is no doubt that the crew of Vim was better when we started racing each other. The Vimmers had been sailing together since early in the season and the reason why Vim showed up so well in the trials was due to her crew. Columbia was definitely the faster hull but she took a long time in showing it due solely, in my opinion, to the fact that Vim's crew had been welded together into a team earlier. We finally achieved success but it was a long haul and we only just made it. This hard fighting in the eliminations put us in better shape than Sceptre's crew, who did not have a tough competitor to fight all season as we did. For that matter we had three.

Much has been written about Sceptre's hull form and, I might say, much of it by people who are not really qualified. I would



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not dare to venture any opinion on so technical and involved an art as hull design. Suffice it to say that Columbia pointed higher and footed a little faster on the wind, and had a slight edge on Sceptre reaching and running. In accounting for "Why We Won The America's Cup," this no doubt helped us!

As regards the sails, if the cup match had been a month later Columbia's sails might have been a little better. I think that, even so, they were better than Sceptre's, largely because the management of the Columbia Syndicate was never satisfied whereas Sceptre's were probably considered satisfactory and her syndicate probably said, "Now let's get on with the business of sailing." We found that a sail which looked very nice down at City Island took on an entirely different shape as soon as it got up in the fog off Newport and I am quite sure that the English had a similar experience with Sceptre's sails.

As in all complex things, no one can point to any particular feature and say we won the America's Cup because of this or that. It is the total of all the hundreds of small things plus a few big ones. Columbia could have had the better hull, but if the English sails had been better and ours had been worse, or Columbia's mast had been poorly designed or made, Sceptre might have won.

Unfortunately, each time a challenge is made, a new group takes charge and makes many of the same old mistakes again, plus a few new ones. The exception in this respect was, of course, the Endeavour I and II efforts. Had not Ranger been such an extraordinary yacht, England might have had a chance in 1937 because Endeavour II was a faster boat than her predecessor which did so well in 1934.

Let's hope that if another challenge is made within a year or two that designer David Boyd gets the chance again, so that he can profit from the experience he has gained this year.

crepitude, the dank children clutching a starfish and a beachball, and bobbing out into the bay. Joe's wife was a little modish for a boat ride, and Joe, of course, was in summer blues, as a Lt. Cmdr. should be.

I don't know when the clarity of Anna's conscience felt the first gnawing tooth of doubt. But the Wrights are from Revolutionary stock; no summer soldiers and sunshine hostesses in their line. Engine missing, exhaust black and carboniferous in the clear air, Stormy splashed and chattered to H.M.S. Troubridge.

A British destroyer in a state of total peace is an awesome sight. What can be polished is polished, and what can be varnished is varnished, and every thing else has been painted several times. Fancy scrubbed-string lacework decorates the stages of the companionway, and gold lace and a sword and a polished brass spyglass and gloves decorate the officer of the deck. And he decorates his duty with starched precision. As he came to rigid attention, Stormy's engine gave a last convulsion, an explosive protest, and died. Stormy made a thunderous landing on momentum. And the little boys set up a clamor to get out for personal reasons.

Behind the Brookses and the chattering children, Tugboat Annie made her barefoot ascent up the whole three flights of the companionway, got saluted, and crossed the scrubbed

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